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NASIS

NEBRASKA ANNUAL SOCIAL INDICATORS SURVEY

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SUPPORT CONCEPT OF
LIVING WILLS

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The Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey

David R. Johnson and Alan Booth, 1987 Study Co-Directors

The findings in this report are based on data collected in the Twelfth Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey (NASIS). This survey is part of an on-going study of the quality of life in Nebraska conducted by the Bureau of Sociological Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

In the Fall of 1987, a representative sample of 1882 Nebraskans eighteen years of age or older living in households was interviewed by telephone. The respondents were selected using a random digit telephone sampling design. The interview averaged approximately 30 minutes and included questions about work, recreation, attitudes towards public services, taxes, and political and social issues. Other items included in the survey measured the quality of life in the state. For the entire sample, 95 out of 100 times the percentages computed from the items asked on the survey are likely to be accurate to within plus or minus 2.3 percent of the figure that would have been obtained if each adult in Nebraska had been surveyed. This is an estimate of maximum error and for most items the percentages are likely to be even more accurate.

The data gathered by NASIS are used by a wide variety of state and local government agencies for policy and program planning and by faculty and students at the University of Nebraska and other colleges for research and training. No information identifying any respondent is released to any users and the strict confidentiality of individual respondents is rigidly enforced. While the final responsibility for the organisation and structure of the survey and for reports produced rests with the Bureau of Sociological Research, public agencies and university departments play an integral part in planning the survey through an Advisory Committee. Public organisations interested in membership on the Advisory Committee should contact the NASIS Study Directors.

Funding for NASIS comes from the University of Nebraska, the Bureau of Sociological Research, and state and local agencies which buy items and data analysis from the survey.

The NASIS surveys are repeated each year to measure change in the quality of life in Nebraska. While there is a core of questions which is included every year, each survey has a large component of unique items which address specific topical areas. Additional details on the NASIS surveys or questions regarding the use of the survey data or cost of purchasing items on future surveys can be obtained by contacting Alan Booth or David R. Johnson, NASIS Study Directors, at the Bureau of Sociological Research or by sending for a copy of the 1988 NASIS Prospectus.

NEBRASKANS STRONGLY SUPPORT CONCEPT OF LIVING WILLS

Living wills have been a topic of concern for a number of years. A number of states (38) have laws that permit people to sign statements that instruct physicians not to use extreme measures to keep them alive when they are terminally ill. Bills making living wills legal have been before the Nebraska Legislature for the last four years. This year the Legislature will be considering LB88, which is similar to bills that have been adopted by other states. Given the interest in such legislation, a question about living wills was included on the most recent Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey.

In October and November of 1987, 467 people were asked: "Some states permit people to sign living wills that instruct physicians not to use extreme measures to keep them alive when they are terminally ill. Supporters say terminally ill people should not be made to endure excessive pain and suffering. Opponents of living wills say such laws could encourage mercy killings, perhaps of people who wish to continue to live. Do you favor or oppose legislation that would make living wills legal?" As the data in Table 1 show, a significant majority (75%) favor living wills. Eighteen percent oppose them and 7% are uncertain.

Table 1. Percent Who Favor or Oppose Living Wills

	Percent	Number in Category
Favor	75	352
Oppose	18	83
Uncertain	7	32
Total	100	467

We checked to see if responses differed by the sex of the respondent, marital status, whether they had voted in the last two years, the size of the community in which they lived, and their health. There were no differences.

We also checked on religious affiliation and age and found modest differences. Catholics were less likely to favor living wills than were people with other religious affiliations. Seventy-four percent of Catholics favored living will legislation whereas 83 percent of people with other affiliations did so. Also, people 50 and over were less likely to favor such legislation (73%) than were those 49 and under (85%). We checked to see if those 50 and over whose health was fair or poor favored it less than those whose health was good or excellent. Health did not make a difference.

In short, there is significant public support for living will legislation. While those 50 and over and Catholics were less likely to favor living will legislation, even in these groups a majority favored the concept.

List of reports already released using data gathered in the 1987 Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey. These may be purchased at the indicated price from the Bureau of Sociological Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Report Number	Title
1	1987 NASIS Methodology Report: Study Design, Instruments, and Forms. David R. Johnson. Price: $7.50.
2	Majority Favor Higher Salaries For Legislators. Alan Booth. Price: $ .50.
3	Majority Favor Alternatives to Death Penalty. Alan Booth. Price: $1.00.